

# **ROSS SCHOOLHOUSE**

**Constructed: 1872**

**Address: 159 East 400 North**

**Present owners: Sam/Susan Cowans**

By the early 1870's railroad business in the northeast part of Lehi near the Utah Southern station had effected a population boom. Residents in this area desired a school. On 23 October 1872, the school board bought a corner lot at 159 East and Fourth North from T.F. Gray and began construction of the Northeast School just three blocks south of the railroad depot. According to the diary of James Kirkham, this one-room wooden school was dedicated on 26 January 1873. The 14 January 1875 Lehi City Council Minutes noted that the cost of the building was \$282.95.

In 1879 a large adobe room was added perpendicularly to the north end of the building. This addition was made possible through joint efforts of the Lehi School District and the Lehi Sunday school. Funds for the building were raised through concerts, dances, and entertainments held under sponsorship of the Sunday School. Church workers hauled the rock, adobes, lumber, and other building materials to the site and constructed the addition under supervision of the school trustees.

J. Edgar Ross, schoolmaster of the Northeast School, taught in the Lehi School system for twenty-nine years--a record at the time of his retirement in 1897.

Immediately appointed a school trustee, Ross also saw the Northeast School renamed in his honor on 7 September 1897.

Like other school buildings in the history of Lehi, the Ross School served as a multi-purpose center. When popular Sunday School teacher Jonas Holdsworth died in 1881, his entire class marched in the funeral procession from the schoolhouse, where the funeral service was held, to the Lehi cemetery. James Kirkham's 24 December 1881 diary entry noted a Sunday School Christmas party in the building, complete with yule tree and Santa Claus. The schoolhouse hosted

a multitude of political meetings (nearly always Republican). The Republican League Club was organized there in 1895. The Ladies Republican Club met there frequently during 1896, once to hear Edgar Ross's son Will deliver a lecture on the "Australian Ballot Box Law."

Aside from the day school, the LDS Church was the most frequent user of the building. For years Sunday evening cottage meetings under the direction of Ward Teachers were held there. But the largest gatherings were Sunday School meetings under the direction of superintendent J. Edgar Ross. The popularity of the Northeast Sunday School was due largely to the leadership of Ross and other energetic young people in the neighborhood (Ross lived one block from the schoolhouse).

Anniversary parties were held yearly where prizes were distributed to each member of the school. Mary Ann Webb and Amanda Ross supervised exceptional banquets with delicious pies, cakes, and English Pudding, delicacies which Lehi children seldom enjoyed in their own homes. Seating was so limited in the building during such activities that those living in the neighborhood usually carried their own chairs to these special functions.

In 1895 the north adobe portion of the Northeast School building housed an elementary class, the original wooden classroom was used by high school students. During the fall of 1896 Joseph J. Anderson conducted "the Lehi Evening School" for two nights a week in the Northeast School. High school students were offered a variety of classes, including arithmetic, book-keeping, grammar shorthand, and typewriting. Anderson was replaced by James B. Gaddie in the spring of 1897, and high school students were then transferred to the Central School.

The 31 May 1898 *Lehi Banner* reported that shutters had been laced over the windows of the vacant Ross building because of vandalism. In 1906 the building was purchased by real estate agent Henry Lewis, and though vacant at times, has been a residence since then. Chad and Julie Engstrom purchased the rundown building in 1983 and renovated what is now one of Lehi's three oldest still-standing public buildings, into their residence. Sam and Susan Cowans own the property today.